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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NIAMEY 000714

SIPDIS

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y --ADDED SIPDIS CAPTION

SIPDIS

DEPT. FOR AF/W; G/TIP; PASS TO USAID FOR KTOWERS; PARIS FOR
AFRICA WATCHER; ACCRA PASS TO WARP

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SUBJECT: COLD CASE: SHARI'A AND THE MIGRATION OF VICE

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SUMMARY

¶1. Open-source reporting and some academic studies have suggested that the imposition of Shari'a in northern Nigeria led to an exodus of prostitutes, petty criminals, and bar owners to the southern frontier zones of Niger. Nigerien Hausaland, these reports suggested, saw a considerable increase in petty crime, promiscuity, and the potential for HIV/AIDS and STD transmission due to the baleful influences of its larger neighbor. Poloff tested this thesis during a recent trip through southern Niger and found that the flow, perhaps exaggerated to begin with, had quickly ebbed as Nigerians learned to live with (and around) Shari'a. While the "big story" was a flop, there is a less dramatic but more important story to be told. International NGOs in Niger are rightly concerned about HIV/AIDS transmission, but for more traditional reasons. Trucking routes and seasonal labor migration ("exode") toward the coast bring HIV to Nigerien Hausaland, leading to localized prevalence rates of almost twenty-five percent, even as Niger's national prevalence rate remains low, at 0.7 percent. NGO interventions in the southern part of the region of Tahoua - a key exode zone and transshipment point - are attempting to contain these pockets and the poverty induced practices that create them. END
SUMMARY

PROBLEMS OF PROXIMITY OR POVERTY?:
TRADE, AIDS, AND SHARI'A IN HAUSALAND

¶2. In a February 2, 2001 piece for the New York Times, journalist Norimitsu Onishi argued that the adoption of Shari'a in nine northern Nigerian states had pushed "hundreds of prostitutes, gamblers and bar owners" over the border into quiet Nigerien farming towns. Onishi's piece was cited by Northeastern University political science professor and Niger specialist William F. S. Miles in a 2004 "Africa Today" article entitled "Shari'a as De-Africanization: Evidence from Hausaland." Miles noted that "state ratification of Shari'a in Northern Nigeria has...'led borderline market communities to peddle goods, services, and pastimes (alcohol, prostitution, gambling) that have been now criminalized in nearby Nigeria." And "some border towns and villages in Niger have become havens for newly criminalized activities in Nigeria, especially drinking, gambling, and prostitution." Within the scope of the limited media and academic attention accorded Niger, the issue of Shari'a and the export of

Nigerian vice to Niger had become a big story.

13. Traveling in Hausaland (specifically the southern departments of the Nigerien administrative regions of Tahoua, Maradi, and Zinder) today, Poloff discovered that the migration of vice suggested by Miles and Onishi was real enough, but also temporary. As Nigeria's Shari'a states become more comfortable in their new legal skin, old habits picked back up, and creative locals found ways around Shari'a's proscriptions. Boube Souley, the Director of the National Police in Maradi, confirmed that his border city had seen an up-tick in prostitution and vice during the early years of Shari'a, but noted that prostitutes and others had gone back to Nigeria after "a couple of years," when they discovered that the application of Shari'a was less intense in practice than in theory. Souley claimed that Nigerian Imams thought Shari'a would heighten their power, but in practice the army and police still held the cards. Secular authorities, he claimed, allowed some cases to go to the Shari'a courts, but withheld others. Even the Shari'a courts, it is widely believed, are thoroughly corruptible. Souley's perception, from across the border, was that Shari'a's impact had been vitiated by politics and corruption. Sensing this, most Nigerian Shari'a refugees" packed up and went home years ago.

14. Souley's impressions were confirmed elsewhere in Hausaland. The Prefect of Magaria, a border town 130km north of Kano, noted that his department had seen a brief increase in prostitution and vice, followed by a rapid decline. To the north, the Zinder police chief said the same. In Birni N'Konni, three kilometers north of the border, Judge Hamza Assoumana Bayere denied that Shari'a had any impact on local vice. He noted that Konni, a prominent border crossing and transshipment point, had always had a problem with prostitution but the problem had not worsened over time. Mayors, police officers, public administrators, and traditional chiefs in cities (Zinder, Maradi, Birni N'Konni) and villages (Sassoumbroum, Kantche) were quick to highlight the differences between them and their southern neighbors. None considered Nigeria origin vice to be a problem.

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15. The NGO Cooperation for American Relief Everywhere (CARE), is concerned about prostitution and HIV/AIDS transmission along the border, but for a different and more traditional set of reasons. Southern Tahoua region, of which Konni is the principal city, has long been famous for "exode" or seasonal economic migration toward coastal West Africa. Returnees are often HIV positive. Konni is also one of the largest entry points for long-distance trucks traversing Niger, and the trucking corridor extends north through Tahoua region for 300km on the way to Agadez and the Mahgreb. CARE is starting a new project targeting "exodants" in both Niger and Cote D'Ivoire. In Niger, the focus is on Bouza, Illela, Tahoua city, and Birni N'Konni. This large triangle takes up most of southern Tahoua Region. Prevalence rates among target populations within the zone are estimated to be as high as 23.1%, compared to a national rate of only 0.7% - the lowest in Africa - and a Tahoua regional rate of 1.0%. CARE's project will encourage testing, and include an anti-discrimination and anti-stigmatization campaign for HIV positive prostitutes, truck drivers, and exodants and their families. Victims' medical needs will also be met.

16. CARE workers in Konni expressed two concerns to Poloff during a May 7 visit. While they agreed that Nigerian prostitutes had both come and gone in the early years of Shari'a they noted that a new phenomenon had appeared at around the time of the initial influx. Nigerien girls in Konni had begun to engage in occasional prostitution, often with just one partner who was usually a truck driver. CARE workers noted that this group was harder to access than career prostitutes, as they "live hidden." Demographic information was likewise difficult to come by, though the

team noted that they were studying this problem more closely. The eastern Nigerien Region of Diffa was likewise a cause for concern. CARE staff claimed that Diffa is emerging as a new high-risk area for HIV/AIDS. They suggested several possible causes for this, including the movement of persons and drugs by traffickers, who exploit Diffa's thinly-populated, poorly policed tracks to head north from Chad or Nigeria to Libya. They also cited instability along the Chadian border and the cross-border movement of persons, particularly nomadic "Mahamid" Arabs in search of pasture. NOTE: The current estimate for HIV prevalence in Diffa is 1.7% of the overall population. END NOTE

COMMENT: THE "LITTLE" STORY
TRUMPS THE "BIG" ONE

17. The concerns of today's NGO workers and government authorities have little to do with what appears to have been a temporary and abnormal influx of Nigerian vice into Niger after the adoption of Shari'a. Rather, the focus is on fundamentals related to poverty and the dangerous practices that it sometimes encourages. Exode by single men; occasional prostitution by young girls; human trafficking and immigration toward Europe and the Mahgreb; and, nomads searching for scarce pasture pose the real risks to public health and stability in Niger. All are poverty induced practices. While the limited media attention Niger receives often draws attention to the dramatic and exceptional "big story," one can say the country's real challenges have more pedestrian origins.
ALLEN